

2nd Sunday Advent – Homily “*Take a Breath this Advent*”

Preparation is a Choice

How are your Advent preparations going? As you know Advent is a time of preparation, and preparation is all about choices. We started the season a week ago with the plea to be vigilant... to be ready... to prepare... But what exactly are we preparing for??? Well there is the rising tide of family, relatives and friends to visit. There is the schedule of Christmas parties, dinners and pageants to attend. There are cookies to bake and presents to purchase. There is the shopping center mania and online purchases to make. There is the tree and the light displays to put up. And we should not forget the work we have to get done at work so that we have time to do the work that needs to be done at home. So much for Peace on Earth and Good will toward men.

Always Preparing

My thoughts this week have been centered on the realization that I have spent a lifetime preparing... preparing to make this choice or that... to do or not do this activity or that. I have spent a great deal of time thinking about the value of my choices. Paul talks about this when he tells us to... “Discern what is of value so that we can live lives that are good and holy.” Discernment is an act of reflection and prayer. It is low energy but intense intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Sometimes the busyness of life forces us to stop and reflect on what we are preparing for... To make a better choice.

Julia’s Choice

As you all know I am a theology teacher at Berks Catholic and as such I have the pleasure of working on our Kairos retreat program. This past Kairos was especially meaningful for me because of a particular young lady who led our team. I would like to share her story with you. As she was preparing to lead the retreat she had this experience...

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This particular school day began like most other school days... coffee, a bus ride that’s too long, and not enough sleep. As classes began her mind turned to the workload that seemed unbearable... She was drowning in feelings of being overwhelmed. She kept thinking about her “to do” list: “Euro test on Friday, and a reminder that for the last test she had to read the chapter 3 times to earn an 87 which meant to get an A on this test she would have to read it 4 times. Eight essays due by November 1st for the colleges she was applying to, and a Research Paper due at the end of the month for a class. And on top of all this... the pressures of applying to college, which included maintaining straight A’s, earning money at a low-paying job, and participating in extra-curricular activities to beef up the college resume.

The rest of the day brought more assignments and things to do and the stress and anxiety worsened... As she entered my classroom she proceeded to pour out all of her complaints/frustrations and concerns to any one and everyone who would listen. Overhearing her anxiety I gathered my thoughts before I suggested that she “take a breath”... I then took a moment to address the class and asked them all to reflect on the things they had to be grateful for. Unconvinced she rolled her eyes and proceed to do her work before heading home to work on the “to do” list.

The anxiety followed her... She could not shake the uncomfortable feeling she had in the pit of her stomach. In her despair God nudged her. She told her parents that she wanted to go to the daily evening mass... she needed a break. The trip to Mass went as most of the day had gone... stuck behind a slow moving pickup truck with a loaded trailer that took up a lane and a half and had pulled out in front of her. She began to sob. She arrived at Mass late as the priest was starting his homily. He was reflecting on the story of Martha and Mary. And God spoke again...

The priest touched on the distractions that plague our life: deadlines, anxiety, and too many worldly commitments. He reminded those present

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to focus on and make time for God, *every day*. Just when she thought God was paying no attention to her, she felt His presence and comfort.... For the first time in while she was at peace

She returned home, traveling at an uncommonly slow speed for her, and as she drove she felt the stress melting away. Refreshed... she realized that nothing was fixed... The workload and the deadlines were still there, time continued to march on, but now God was walking with her... she had him and she had peace.

God's Providence

As I listened to her it occurred to me that we are really good at preparing our selves and the ones we love to be busy... To be prepared for anything and everything life has to offer. However I am not so sure that we, or those we love are reflecting on the value of the choices available. How often are we asking... what is the value of this choice to the salvation of my soul and the souls of those I love?

In this young lady's story I was touched by the value of her choice... her choice to fight to keep God close to her. She made a choice for her soul. Her choice was a reminder to me that in God's providence, we are given what we need to get through the craziness of every day. That providence comes through the practice of our faith: Mass, the Sacraments, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, prayer, and quiet time.

The most important thing we can do is to seek the presence of God... and to put ourselves in his presence... to take a breath. It is God who has given us the tools to prepare for the coming of his Son... He gives us his Son several times everyday. He is present to us anytime we wish to spend time in His presence. He calls us to focus on the things that matter... to consider the value of improving our relationship with him.

Things that Matter.

What do we really want for Christmas? Is it the peace, joy, and happiness that the coming of Christ promises??? To have that we must ask ourselves

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daily... How can we remain in His peace? We must question the demands of a workload or “to do” list that deliberately seeks worldly activities over interior recollection and time with Jesus! We must challenge the value of our choices.

Interior recollection and time spent in the presence of Christ is a choice... It is a way to prepare... to take stock of what really matters... to determine what we value. It is a choice to seek him and to be in His presence... to take a breath, and to be grateful for all that we have.